

## PANKAJ SARAN:

# «OUR OBJECTIVE IS TO MAKE INDIA A GLOBAL MANUFACTURING HUB AND TECHNOLOGY-DRIVEN SOCIETY»



Interview with Ambassador of Republic of India in Russian Federation Mr. **PANKAJ SARAN**.

### Igor KOROTCHENKO

— So, perhaps, let's start with Russian-Indian relations. How are they assessed by Mr. Ambassador and what prospects do we have?

— The relationship with Russia is based on time-tested relationship and mutual trust and we enjoy a special and privileged strategic partnership with Russia. Over the years this relationship has become stronger, more comprehensive. Today we cooperate in almost all sectors of activity which includes political, economic, trade, culture and humanitarian affairs. I will say that for Indian foreign policy our relationship with Russia is one of the

most important. It is a very dynamic relationship and we have very frequent high-level contacts between our two leaders.

Last year during the celebrations of the seventieth anniversary we had a series of ministerial and other visits. This year again we will be preparing for the next summit meeting between our two leaders. The personal chemistry and relationship between our two leaders is strong and they enjoy close mutual understanding on all aspects.

We are also looking at developing new areas of cooperation apart from the traditional areas. One of these areas is collaboration between the regions of Russia and the states of India. We find that there is a lot of potential here for economic and investment dealings with each other. Also I would point to science and technology; I would refer to connectivity proposals, including the International North-South Transport Corridor and new forms of cooperation in high technology areas.

Our dealings with Russia are not limited only to bilateral issues. Today we are in a position to discuss and cooperate on important regional and global issues as well. This includes, of course, also key regional and multilateral organizations of which we are members, such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, BRICS, the G-20 and our common work in the Asia-Pacific Region. A subject of great importance to India is the fight against global terrorism and need to work together as the international community to combat terrorism and all those who support terrorism.

So the agenda is quite vast and what we are now in the process of doing is to take this relationship to a new and higher level and to identify newer areas of growth which correspond to our national priorities and our national capabilities.

— How do you see the military-technical cooperation between our countries and in what areas is it of most interest to India?

— Military-technical cooperation is a long-standing area of cooperation between India and Russia. We have had a history of success in this sector. We are confident that our military and technical cooperation will continue to grow. Russia was one of those countries in the world which had helped India in developing its military and industrial and technological capabilities soon after we became independent and we always remember that page of our relationship.

Over the last decades this relationship has become even deeper. We are now trying to take it to the next level which is to work with Russian companies to devel-



op and to establish a modern defense manufacturing industry within India. We are trying to build upon the successful example of the BrahMos Joint Venture and create new such enterprises and focus more on aspects relating to technology transfer and manufacturing.

We continue to work with Russia in terms of ensuring the serviceability of existing platforms for which we have an Intergovernmental Military Technical Commission.

Apart from military-technical cooperation, we also have a history of holding joint exercises. Last year we held the first ever tri-services exercise near Vladivostok which was a great success. We continue to hold other exercises on an annual basis. We are also now increasing our military contacts in terms of training, high-level exchanges and other forms of military cooperation.

— We see that missile threats are growing markedly in the region. In particular, India's neighbours, Pakistan and China, are actively developing missile technologies, and joint production of fighters is underway. In this regard, there is an objective need for India to have an effective air and missile defense system. Moreover, it's about long-range air defense systems. In this regard, India has expressed interest in Russian S-400 SAM systems; how do you assess the relevance of establishing a powerful anti-aircraft,

anti-missile defense system of India based on advanced Russian technology in this area?

— As far as threats to Indian security are concerned, we have an ongoing appraisal and review of the threats to our security, whether it is military or of any other type. We are quite confident that we have the necessary resources and the arrangements to counter whatever threats are posed to our country. For this we deploy modern technology, we upgrade the capabilities of our defense forces and we look at our own military doctrines. It is a comprehensive national process.

Insofar our cooperation with Russia is concerned, as I mentioned earlier, military-technical cooperation has been one of the key pillars of our overall security policy in the past and Russia continues to play a very important role in our defense preparedness. Insofar as the S-400 system is concerned, this is a major and modern platform. The concerned experts from both sides have been in discussion on this matter and I would like to leave it to them and to our respective Defense Ministries to take these discussions forward.

— India sees itself as one of the global centers of the modern world. It's really true, because the human, intellectual, industrial potential of India is huge. This is objective and India claims a lead-



ing role in the modern world. At the same time, we know that the modern world is very controversial, and it is possible to pursue a confident foreign policy based on military potential. In this regard, India is implementing a policy of diversifying arms purchases. This means that eggs are not put in one basket, and arms procurement from France and other countries, which are traditionally India's partners in military-technical cooperation, is underway. At the same time, the Make in India initiative with the transfer of technology has been launched and it's certainly very important. We have long-term cooperation in the field of aviation programs, including primarily the SU-30MKI fighters, which India has been manufacturing under license at HAL's facilities. In this regard, I would like to see if you could also say how important is the transfer of technology within the framework of ongoing consultations between Russia and India on the joint development of a fifth-generation fighter aircraft based on the PAK FA or SU-57, which is being adopted by Russia for service. In this regard, how important are the transfer of such technologies to India and possible projects for India to become an independent competence center for the development and batch production of fifth-generation fighter aircraft in the Indian version, which will give India a completely new geopolitical quality. And let's not forget that fifth-generation fighters are also being developed in China.

— Russia has been one of the oldest partners of India when it comes to technology transfer and military cooperation. This partnership goes back many decades and we highly evaluate the contribution that Russia has made to our military and defense capabilities.

When it comes to the question of India's military purchases from other countries I would only say that this is not something which is new. We have been undertaking military purchases from other countries also in the past and this is based on the appraisal and the evaluation made by our defense forces. But the quality and scale of our military-technical cooperation with Russia is still well beyond that which we have with any other country in the world.

When it comes to new projects that we are discussing I would only like to say that these are projects which are under discussion at the expert level between the Defense Ministries and I would leave it at this point.

— Could you tell our readers about the role of India's nuclear forces in ensuring the security of the country? Moreover, a successful launch of the Agni-5 ballistic missile has taken place recently. What a role do nuclear forces play in the depths of the Indian forces?

— As is known, India has a No First Use nuclear doctrine. It is consistent and it is valid even today. Yes, to ensure adequate technology and preparedness the Indian defense forces and Indian research and development institutions do periodically conduct tests admissible under international law and our legal obligations which is something which other nuclear powers also do. India is a responsible nuclear power. We understand the significance of nuclear weapons and we have an unblemished record of ensuring complete nuclear security. India was one of the first advocates of global nuclear disarmament. In the United Nations and in other forums we have advocated for complete and total nuclear disarmament. This remains very much our policy even today.

— From the point of view of India, what is the current military-political situation in South Asia? What are the risks and threats, if any, to security?

— We have very close historical and deep ties with all the South Asian countries. We cooperate with them in

every area, in every walk of life, both bilaterally and sub regionally. We believe that the security and prosperity of the countries of South Asia contributes to our own national security. Today the problems that the countries of South Asia face are quite similar. These relate to economic development, climate change, raising the standards of living of people and problems of regional imbalances.

Above all, one of the problems which we all face is that of terrorism and on this we have a common understanding that terrorism has to be fought unitedly and without double standards. The problem is that we have one country in South Asia which has a different view about terrorism. That is a challenge that we have to face and we are facing, but with that one exception, I would say that everyone else is united in the belief that terrorism has to be wiped out. India wants to live in peace with all its neighbours. We have no territorial desires or designs.

Our focus today is to develop our own country in an atmosphere which is secure and free from terrorism, together with our other neighbours.

— The Russian-Indian military-technical cooperation has a lot of opponents who do not want India and Russia to cooperate, because objectively speaking, India still buys the best weapons available in Russia, while Russia sees India as a priority partner. India gets what no other country will get just by definition: lease of nuclear submarines so that Indian sailors could earn their operating experience and then apply it in the construction of India's ocean-going submarine fleet, the export of aviation technology, and the BrahMos program, where India receives a package of transfer programs for the development of advanced missile technologies. Nevertheless, there is strong opposition to it outside India and there is a certain group of lobbyists inside the country, consisting basically of the press and retired generals, who often intentionally harm. Do you remember the situation when they wrote that India allegedly admitted US Navy representatives to an operational nuclear-powered Russian submarine and revealed all the secrets. It was obviously fake news, you commented saying that was not the case, and we ourselves said in the Russian press that these were purposeful enemies that harm our cooperation. Given such deliberate informational actions aimed to drive a wedge between Moscow and Delhi and cause distrust, do you think it is necessary to counteract such attempts on the part of third forces, third countries that are trying to harm a trust relationship between India and Russia in the military-technical sphere, to counter the information policy of this kind?

— On this question of India-Russia military-technical cooperation it is important to understand that India is a sovereign country. We make our own decisions with regard who we cooperate with not only in the military-technical area but in any sector and I would say that all



decision-making in India is of a sovereign nature. It is not influenced or affected by any third party and no third party has a role to play in deciding the kind of cooperation India will have with Russia. This is a fundamental principle of our cooperation with Russia.

Military-technical cooperation by its nature is based on trust and confidence and we have ensured and we will continue to ensure that this level of trust and confidence is maintained.

— What are the priorities for India in the twenty-first century? We respect very much the current Prime Minister of India — Mr. Modi is the politician of a new formation who leads India to the club of great world powers and what are the global strategic objectives that India sets for itself in the twenty-first century?

— I would say it is the development of India as understood and defined in its broadest sense. India has become a two trillion dollar economy. Our objective is to expand this and raise this level to five trillion dollars if not more. But that is not all. Our objective is to make India a global manufacturing hub, to make India a country which is a knowledge-based and technology-driven society, to make India an open economy and to address the core problems that face India.

India has a population today of almost 1.3 billion people. 65 percent of that population is below the age of thirty-five. Our challenge is to skill them, to educate them, to employ them and so, in overall terms, the objectives are largely focused on the rapid, sustainable and balanced economic development of India which is done in a manner which is ecologically and climate friendly. We want to preserve the values that India stood for, the values for which India gained independence from colonialism seventy years ago, and to ensure that these values remain valid even today. By these I mean the respect for democracy, respect for multi-pluralism and respect for diversity.

We also want to see that the international framework is broad based and it is equitable, respects all countries of the world and is based on the foundations of international law. The role of the United Nations must be pre-

served. The world is changing and we see India as part of that change and in that context the United Nations has to reform itself to reflect the changes that are going on in the world and that includes the development of India and the growth of India.

We hope that through our progress we can contribute to global prosperity, to global security and to global peace. When India became a member of the G-20 after the 2008 financial crisis we did so in the full understanding that the economic growth of India will make a significant difference to the global economy. Events since then have proved that how the Indian economy develops makes an impact on global growth. For the last more than ten years India has been growing on an average rate of about seven percent. Our objective is to increase this rate of growth even further and for this the government is undertaking radical reforms in all areas including taxation, ease of doing business and so on.

In the twenty first century we would like India to develop as a dynamic technological economy, to be part of the international community's efforts to ensure that the world order is based on principles of rule of law, and that we contribute to challenges like climate change, the fight against terrorism and develop a global security architecture which addresses the concerns of all countries in the world on an equal footing.

— The final question is rather short: much is said about the UN reform, in particular: would it be fair for India to get a permanent seat on the UN Security Council and how do you feel about it?

— India has always believed that the United Nations Security Council, formed after World War II, is no longer reflective of contemporary realities and the reform of the Security Council has therefore become long overdue. If we want the United Nations Security Council to be more effective and to reflect the current realities of the twenty-first century rather than the realities of the twentieth century, then its reform is essential and we believe that in any reform exercise that takes place India would have a legitimate role to play and would be a natural choice for permanent membership of the Security Council. 🇮🇳